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SUBJECT: MILITARY INTEGRATION ("BRASSAGE") IN THE DRC

REF: A. 07 Kinshasa 659 B. Kinshasa 186

¶1. Summary: "Brassage" is the DRC military integration process through which ex-combatants and FARDC soldiers are re-trained together and formed into integrated brigades. It is a key element of security sector reform (SRR) in the DRC, and inextricably linked to the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) process. It faces continuing challenges, which will be heightened if large numbers of ex-combatants from North and South Kivu choose military integration as a result of the Goma process. End summary.

¶2. The signing of the Global and All Inclusive Agreement of 2003 confronted the GDRC with the challenge of integrating ex-combatants of the signatory armed groups into the Congolese armed forces (FARDC) or reintegrating them into civilian life. The GDRC determined that meeting this challenge required not just a process to bring ex-combatants into the FARDC, but overall military reform, in addition to the opportunity to reintegrate into civilian life. This overarching need for military reform fundamentally shaped DDR structures and processes. The Ministry of Defense included in its new general staff and command hierarchy a Military Integration Structure (SMI "Structure Militaire d'Integration") to design and implement a military reform program. Reintegration into the FARDC through the brassage process is at the core of that reform. The National DDR Plan implementing agency (formerly CONADER, now UEPN-DDR) is also under the Minister of Defense. The National DDR

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Plan links military reform (through the process of brassage) and reintegration of ex-combatants into civilian life through a uniform set of procedures for every ex-combatant up until the point that they choose either the civilian or military option called the "tronc commun". During the different phases of this common process, both SMI and UEPN-DDR have particular roles, but they must work together. From that point forward, UEPN-DDR is responsible for civilian reintegration, and SMI is responsible for military integration.

"Le tronc commun"

¶3. Under the National DDR Plan, all ex-combatants pass through a common process ("tronc commun") in which the SMI and UEPN-DDR work in concert, before they choose between the military and civilian options. SMI, UEPN-DDR and MONUC work together to inform possible participants, and ensure that militia leadership provide a list of their members. Individual participants then assemble at pre-identified sites to disarm and receive a disarmament certificate. MONUC and SMI conduct these operations jointly. From there, individual adult participants report to a demobilization transit site (or orientation center) managed by UEPN-DDR, where they are identified and registered biometrically (individuals who are

already in the ex-combatant database are turned away).

¶4. At the transit site, participants receive information about military integration and civilian reintegration. Participants may choose either option. If the participant selects integration into the FARDC ("brassage"), SMI is to evaluate the candidate. Those under 18, judged not physically capable or "morally unsuitable" are, in principle, redirected to civilian life. (Note: A similar evaluation process was also to be used to pare down the size of the military, but is not currently being implemented. End note.)

¶5. Joint SMI and National DDR Plan guidelines enable authorities to disqualify ex-combatants who have abused human rights and/or are reasonably suspected of war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity at any time. These criteria appear to be routinely ignored in practice.

"Brassage"

¶6. SMI transports Ex-combatants accepted for integration into the FARDC to an integration center ("centre de brassage") operated by the military. They receive basic training of around 45 days and are formed into a new "integrated" brigade composed of ex-combatants from different armed groups as well as FARDC troops. To break its members' ties to their former leaders, the brigade should then be deployed to a region different than those its members are drawn from.

¶7. Brassage began in February 2004 in Kisangani with the training by Belgium of the first integrated brigade. It was equipped and deployed to Ituri District, where it receives ongoing support training from MONUC. It has been engaged in operations there, but has also been implicated in serious human rights abuses. During 2005, Angola, Belgium and South Africa supported the training of

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additional FARDC brigades at Kamina in Katanga province. The FARDC was responsible for training at Mushaki and Nyaleke in North Kivu and Luberizi in South Kivu (ref A).

Challenges

¶8. Both the tronc commun and brassage processes continue to experience challenges. Some are the result of breakdowns in the process. For example, a number of combatants who surrendered to the FARDC during fighting in North Kivu in October 2007, including some who had been kidnapped and forced to serve as militia fighters, were all transported to Kamina for brassage. The UNEPN-DDR later registered those who surrendered, but there are no documented cases of individuals opting for civilian life at a military integration center. Moreover, this occurred at a time when no DDR program was in place to provide reintegration assistance.

¶9. In December 2006, dissident General Laurent Nkunda agreed to "mix" his and FARDC battalions together in single brigades, while leaving existing command and control structures largely in place. "Mixage" was a confidence-building measure aimed at meeting Nkunda's demand that his fighters remain in North Kivu to protect the local Tutsi population from attack by the FDLR and other armed groups. In practice, it undermined efforts to integrate them into the FARDC, as it allowed Nkunda to retain parallel control over his former forces. By October 2007, the mixed brigades had completely disintegrated, and two months later Nkunda's troops easily defeated the FARDC's Masisi offensive.

¶10. Tensions can remain high during the brassage process, particularly when candidates are assembled at centers for months at a time awaiting training. In February 2008, an armed confrontation between ex-combatants (principally ex-Nkunda loyalists) and FARDC commandos left 27 wounded at Kamina base (ref B).

¶11. Recurring costs associated with the brassage centers, such as food and salaries typically not covered by international donors, have also been a problem for the GDRC. Living conditions at

brassage centers were once so poor that an estimated 2,500 of the 6,000 integrated troops deserted between March and August 2005.

Comment

¶12. Conditions at brassage centers will be a matter of serious concern if large numbers of ex-combatants from North and South Kivu choose brassage through the Goma process in the near future. The large amounts of food and other supplies they will require is a matter of serious concern to the SMI and international facilitators alike. End comment.

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